

CHAPTER VI

VILLAGES, HOUSES AND THEIR CONTENTS

A. Hill Maria Villages, Houses and their Contents

- 361 THE site of the Hill Maria village is in these days almost entirely determined by its convenience as a centre from which to cultivate the *penda* slopes of the year. Peace has reigned in the Abujhmar hills from time immemorial, and no question of defence arises when a village is built. A possible relic of former unsettled times
- [349] is the custom of building stone cairns and seats as look-outs at the head of passes or the summits of hills on the paths leading to villages; but these are convenient watching places for herdsmen when their cattle are grazing around the hill-tops, and serve also to mark the line of the paths which, in the rains, are overgrown with rank grass, or fall into disuse when villages or *penda* slopes are abandoned for alternative sites. Certain well-defined tracks
- 487 through the hills are cleared annually by the villagers; these often avoid the actual village sites, to which side tracks connect them. There are no carts in the hills, and therefore the tracks are only foot-paths, generally wide enough only for a party to walk in single file, though at the periodic clearings the grass is cut down to a width of two or three feet on each side of the path. The village
- 361 boundary is usually marked by a cairn of stones, in the centre of which may be planted a pole ornamented at the top with bunches of grass or peacock or jungle-cock feathers, the pole being further adorned by peeling off bands of bark at intervals throughout its length. The boundary itself is usually a stream, and the cairns of the two villages are usually twenty or thirty yards apart, so that
- [783] when the annual *pira-manzha* (called by the Bison-horn Marias *rag-burris* and by Halbi-speakers *bokarasi*) ceremony of ridding the village of disease takes place, the old winnowing-fans with the sweepings of each house can be hung up beyond the boundary on this no-man's-land without leaving them on the lands of the neighbouring village.

487 These paths cross streams by stepping-stones, by logs felled across the stream, by small raised embankments pierced by hollowed tree trunk pipes for the passage of the water and revetted with horizontally laid logs, or by bridges consisting of a plank supported by bamboo wicker-work cylinders filled with boulders resting on

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